

NUCLEAR THREAT REDUCTION CAMPAIGN
A program of The Justice Project

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 27, 2001

Contacts:

Rich Masters, Press Secretary for Senator Landrieu, 202-224-5824

Chuck Fant, Press Secretary for Rep John Spratt, 202-225-5501

April Kaufman, Press Secretary for Rep Ellen Tauscher, 202-225-1880

Elizabeth Buchanan, Fenton Communications, 202-822-5200

Common Ground Sought for Nuclear Security in 21st Century Lawmakers Introduce "Nuclear Threat Reduction Act of 2001"

Washington, D.C. – In an effort to decrease the dangers posed by nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War era, Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Representative John Spratt (D-SC), and Representative Ellen Tauscher (D-CA) today introduced the Nuclear Threat Reduction Act of 2001 (NTRA). The bill is based on three principles: reducing the numbers of nuclear warheads, removing as many weapons as feasible from high alert status, and preventing the diversion of Russian nuclear weapons, expertise, and weapons-usable materials.

"This bill reflects the broad consensus – including President Bush and many top defense experts – that the United States can and should take the lead to reduce the threat of nuclear weapons resulting, not just from global war, but also from accident, miscalculation, terrorism, or unauthorized use," said Senator Mary Landrieu, who chairs the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities.

Despite improved relations, Russia and the U.S. have thousands of nuclear weapons on high alert, ready to launch in minutes. Russia's weak economy has compromised the safety of its nuclear arsenal, creating the distinct possibility of proliferation to "rogue" states or terrorists and a nuclear disaster affecting American citizens.

"The legislation we are introducing today builds on this and other concerns," said Representative Spratt, the second ranking Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee. "This bill seeks to shrink the size of our nuclear arsenals, remove as many weapons as feasible from 'high alert,' and beef up our investment in cooperative threat reduction programs. These goals should not be controversial. In one form or another, each of these ends has been endorsed by President Bush and by an array of defense experts, including Senator Sam Nunn and Senator Howard Baker. We recommend them in the hope of finding common ground."

"As the world's only remaining superpower, it's up to us to take the lead and engage Russia in improving the security of both our aging stockpiles of nuclear weapons," said Representative Ellen Tauscher, who holds a seat on the House Armed Services Committee. Rep. Tauscher is also the Ranking Member on the panel that oversees the National Nuclear Security Administration, which was created by Congress in 1999 to manage America's nuclear weapons program in light of security and management concerns at the Energy Department.

Reducing U.S., Russian Nuclear Warheads

The NTRA establishes a U.S. policy to seek agreement with Russia to cut the two countries' nuclear weapons to the lowest numbers consistent with U.S. national security. The bill repeals the existing law that prevents the reduction of strategic forces below START I levels (6,000) and suggests unilateral cuts, where necessary, to spur agreement on overall reductions by both sides. But it defers to the President on the magnitude of the cuts.

"While nuclear weapons remain a vital part of our deterrent, we are holding on to legacy systems that only made sense in the context of the Cold War. They do not enhance our national security, but they do drain away

resources needed to combat today's evolving threats," said Senator Landrieu. "President Bush indicated his interest in nuclear weapons reductions during the campaign. In the wake of the recent summit, I believe we have an excellent opportunity to find bipartisan agreement on this critical issue."

Removing Weapons from High Alert Status

The NTRA declares that it is U.S. policy to join with Russia to remove as many weapons as feasible from "high alert" status – weapons poised to "launch on warning" -- while meeting national security needs, an idea President Bush proposed as a candidate.

"A good first step for the United States would be to take the weapons off high alert that would be removed from our nuclear arsenal under START II and to strongly urge the Russians to follow suit. This would instantly help make the world safer while preserving America's national security," said Representative Tauscher.

Russia's strategic infrastructure continues to deteriorate. Russian systems reportedly malfunction frequently, including switching to combat mode for no apparent reason, and there are gaps in Russia's early warning systems. In 1995, Russian radar operators believed they had detected a missile headed for Russia. An alarmed President Yeltsin, with Russia's "nuclear suitcase" by his side, immediately conferred with top advisors. Minutes before the deadline to counterattack, Russian senior officers determined the rocket – launched for scientific research -- was headed out to sea. Norway had informed Russia of the planned launch a few weeks in advance, but word had not reached the proper authorities.

Accelerating Programs to Prevent Nuclear Proliferation or Diversion

The NTRA would increase funding for nonproliferation programs to \$2 billion next year to prevent the diversion of the Russian nuclear arsenal and the expertise of unemployed and underpaid Russian nuclear scientists.

"These increases are substantial, but still fall short of what was recommended by the recent Baker-Cutler Task Force," said Representative Spratt. The bipartisan Task Force, headed by former Senate Republican Leader Howard Baker and former White House counsel Lloyd Cutler, assessed the U.S.-Russia non-proliferation programs and urged that they be accelerated to address our "most urgent unmet national security threat."

Russia has enough fissile material to build at least 60,000 weapons. Much of it is alarmingly insecure, as evidenced by a recent report citing open buckets of plutonium housed in complexes without a perimeter fence, leaving it vulnerable to exploitation by "rogue" states and terrorists. As a remedy, the NTRA calls on President Bush to submit a strategic plan to secure and neutralize all weapons-usable material in Russia during the next eight years.

"We have arrived at a critical moment in time where we must take steps to reduce the nuclear threat we face, as comprehensively and urgently as possible," said Ambassador Karl F. Inderfurth, Senior Advisor to The Justice Project's Nuclear Threat Reduction Campaign. "The three steps proposed in the bill introduced by Senator Landrieu and Representatives Spratt and Tauscher are ones that can and must be taken now."

The Nuclear Threat Reduction Campaign, a program of The Justice Project, is working for pragmatic and effective steps to make it increasingly unlikely that nuclear weapons will ever be used. The Justice Project is a national, non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to fighting injustice and creating a more humane and just world.

Additional information and text of the bill are available online at www.nuclearthreatreduction.org

#